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ABSTRACT

Project "Freestyle" involved the development of prototypical television materials and a comic book intended to combat sex-role stereotyping in career-related attitudes of nine to twelve-year-old children. At various times during the early developmental stages of "Freestyle" materials, "ad hoc fast-turn-around" formative evaluations were conducted. In the first type of evaluation, teachers and parents rated television script segments, assessing language, interest level, and comprehensibility by the potential audience. This feedback assisted the production team in making content changes and selecting scripts. Teachers' evaluations of scripts were compared with subsequent student evaluations of the production segments. In the second type of evaluation, student opinion was consulted with regard to a number of decisions, such as series title, which title to use for an individual pilot program, which actor to choose for one of the pilot shows, whether the proposed definition of "stereotyping" was acceptable, and which type of art to use for the comic book. These types of evaluation provided continuous feedback for the ongoing improvement of the curriculum materials prior to the national field test. (GW)

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AD HOC FAST-TURN-AROUND EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

At various times during the early developmental stages of FREESTYLE materials, formative evaluation provided "ad hoc fast-turn-around" information to broadcast and nonbroadcast decision makers. This evaluation was considered to be ad hoc because the activities were not a regularly scheduled part of formative evaluation, but performed as the need arose and fast-turn-around because of the necessity of keeping pace with the demands of production personnel. This type of evaluation proved to be an effective method for providing continuous feedback for the ongoing improvement of the curriculum materials prior to the national field test.

Two types of "fast-turn-around" were provided; the first type included the evaluation of pre-production script segments and the school and home guide nonbroadcast activities for the purpose of acquiring information relative to acceptance, rejection and rewrite decisions, the second type came about as a result of decision points which involved such questions as which actors to choose for one of the pilot shows, which series title to use, which title for an individual pilot, preferred artwork for the student comic book and whether the proposed definition of stereotyping was acceptable.

Evaluation of Preproduction Materials

Evaluation efforts were directed towards the early FREESTYLE scripts primarily for the first pilot and the early versions of nonbroadcast activities. A total of thirty-eight parents and teachers varied by sex and ethnicity reviewed the materials. A panel of four teachers was used consistently for both script and activity review.

Script segments from two to six minutes in length were submitted to formative research as they were completed by the writers. These were received in numbers ranging from seven to twenty script segments or an entire pilot script at a time. Results were generally requested within two to seven days depending upon the requirements of the task.

Teachers and parents of nine to twelve year olds rated scripts on seven point scales that reflected the language and interest level of the script and comprehension of the objectives by the potential audience. Teachers were asked to rate these variables separately for boys and girls in their classrooms, to rate the appropriate age range of the language and interest level and the classroom usability of the material. Parents were asked to rate scripts in terms of their own child and to rate the suitability of the script for home viewing. Both groups of evaluators were invited to comment on aspects of the scripts that were particularly liked or disliked and to make suggestions for changes. Since this type of evaluation requires brief, easily scored instruments, the survey forms were limited to one page in length.

Results were summarized by calculating means for the combined teachers' ratings and the combined parent ratings for each question and script. For ease of communication of results to production personnel, the composite script score was assigned a star rating from one (lowest rating) to four (highest rating) stars. The producer then interpreted these ratings as one star = not to be used two and three stars = speculative and four stars = definitely to be used.

Of immediate benefit to the producer were the comments and suggestions included by teachers and parents on the script evaluation forms that provided qualitative feedback regarding specific content problems. Examples of this kind of feedback were such things as pointing out why some concepts were too mature for this age group or not relevant to student or home experiences. Positive feedback was also given. This assisted the production team in making content changes and alerting them to possible problem areas. The quantitative ratings system, by contrast, was used principally for narrowing the selection of scripts. Among the thirty-four script segments that were evaluated by teachers and parents thirteen (four of which had been rated four star, five rated three star, four rated two star, and none rated one star) eventually reached production while twenty-one were rejected. Two scripts which received top ratings did not reach production. This was due to an executive decision that although the scripts played well on paper, they would not translate well to the screen. Final selections from four, three,

and two star scripts were made so that there would be a range of ratings from good to poor in order to compare audience ratings of the finished production with these early predictive ratings.

At a later point, following the analysis of the baseline data, there was an opportunity to compare teachers' evaluations of scripts with subsequent evaluations of the production segments by the student audience. Early evaluation of educational television scripts that might predict the success or failure of the finished product with a sample audience can increase the probability of widespread program acceptance, and also can save on production costs.

As can be seen in Table 1, the results of the ad hoc evaluations indicate a moderate and interpretable relationship between teachers' ratings of student liking, interest and "getting the point" with students' likability ratings of production segments and answers to questions about facts in the segments. Similarly, teachers' ratings of "language level" seem to predict the same responses, but in the direction of an inverse relationship between simplicity of language and higher factual comprehension. Clearly, however, these teacher ratings had no utility in predicting responses to questions about the instructional objectives.

Another type of evaluation was used for reviewing the script for Pilot II. Production requested evaluation information using the same scales, but for various points within a complete script

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER PREDICTIONS AND STUDENT RESPONSES

	Student Responses					
	Liking		Factual Comprehension		Objective Comprehension	
Teacher Ratings	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Interest Level	.68*	.73*	.50	.61*	.35	.29
Language Level	.43	.76	-.78*	-.73	.03	.01
Comprehension	.42	.58*	.61*	.59*	.12	.13

*$p < .05$

so that parent and teacher mean responses could be plotted over time. Figure 1 presents the graph used by production to make revisions within the half hour script. Parents were much less critical than teachers, though variation over the subsets of the script was still exhibited by both groups. The graph provided an easily grasped picture of problem areas in the script.

Parent and teacher ratings of nonbroadcast activities were similar to ratings for script segments. Teachers evaluated materials for the School Guide and parents evaluated materials for the Home Guide. As the print materials were tied to fixed printing deadlines but not hampered with the same type of writing constraints as production, greater flexibility in terms of lead time and analysis was permitted. This meant that parents could try out activities leisurely at home and teachers could use activities in their classrooms.

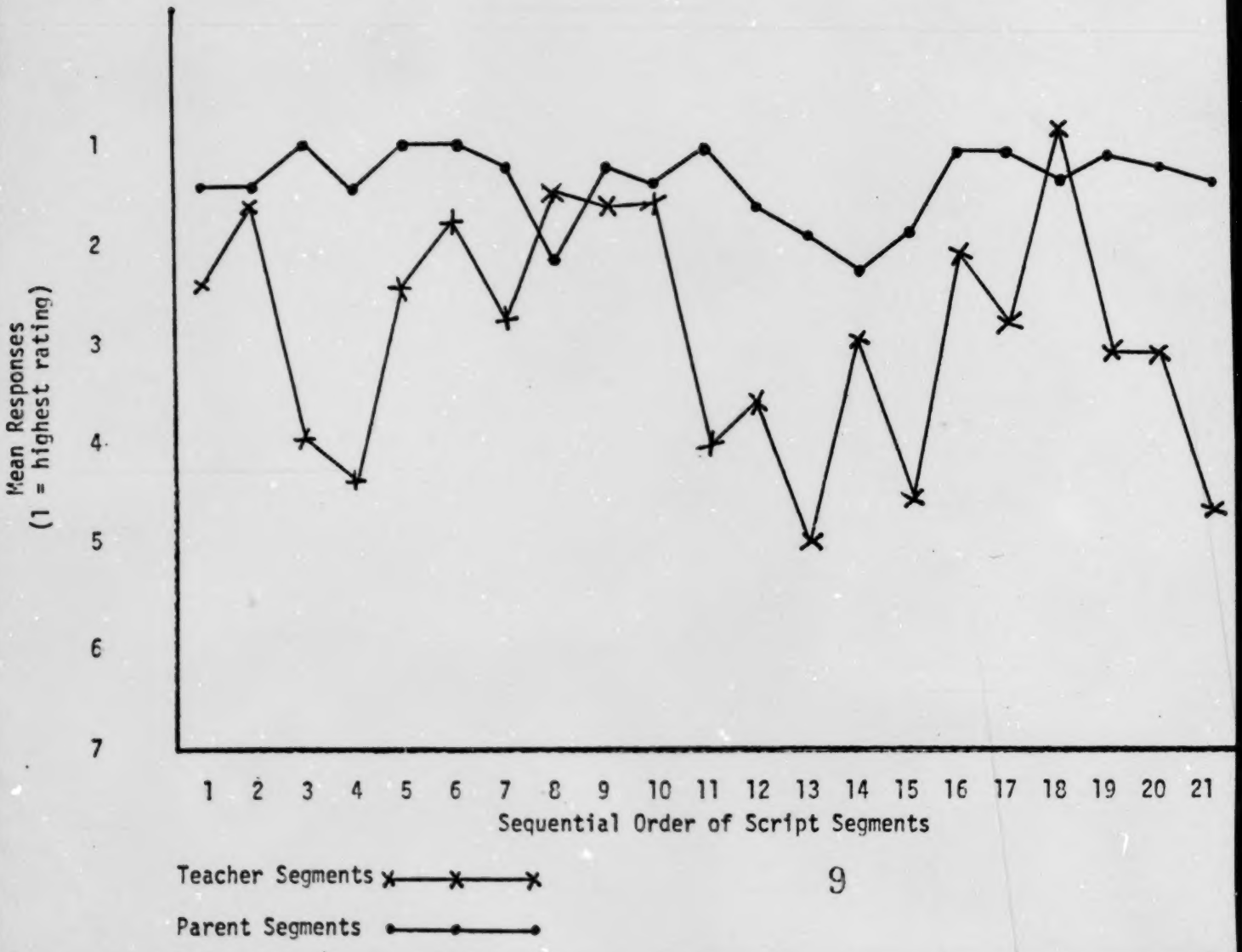
Ad Hoc Studies

The ad hoc evaluations were of the types mentioned earlier: title selections, the screen test and artwork comparisons.

For the selection of the series name production presented a list of ten potential titles for testing. One hundred and twenty fourth, fifth and sixth grade ethnically mixed students voted for their favorite title choice from the list of ten. The first place choice of "Freestyle" was about a three to one favorite over the second choice contender, Time of Your Life. A small group of forty parents also voted for their favorite title which

FIGURE 1

TEACHER AND PARENT RATINGS OF PILOT 2 SCRIPT SEGMENTS



was the second place choice of the students. However, since viewership is aimed primarily at the student audience, the final decision was to go with the student choice.

Another instance of a question being raised over title choice was during the filming of Pilot III. At this point the working title was Chris. However, production was not satisfied with this title. A different group of one hundred and thirty fourth, fifth and sixth grade ethnically mixed students were selected to vote on the seven potential titles selected by production. In this instance, students were asked to rate their top three choices from the total of seven. Students were not given any information about the program for this task. Next, students heard a brief description of the story and were asked to vote again for the best title, the second best and the third best title by putting a 1, 2 or 3 next to the chosen titles. Finally students were asked to tell why they chose a particular title. For both types of title responses, there was great variation for second and third place. However, prior to hearing about the story, the favorite choice was clearly "Grease Monkey." After hearing the story, the favorite choice was overwhelmingly for "Chris." The reason for this switch was evident from the responses to why they chose one or the other. Most students did not know the meaning of grease monkey, but liked it because it sounded very funny and they thought it would be interesting to watch. When the students heard that the story was about a girl named Chris then Chris became their first choice. Given these

results, production decided that an intriguing title was the preferred choice. At the time the question was raised whether students would be disappointed if the show didn't match the expectations aroused by the title. As later shown by our national evaluation data "Grease Monkey" was an overwhelming success, so it appears that not knowing what the title meant was not a problem.

Another unexpected activity was the screen test for the two main teenage characters in Pilot II and the two supporting teenage characters. Three males tried out for the part of the male lead and three females for the female lead. Production provided a videocassette of each male contender reading 50 seconds of a portion of the pilot script with each young actress competing for the female role. This rotation of actor pairs resulted in a total of nine screen tests for the lead roles in which each actor appeared three times. The two supporting parts were not rotated in the same fashion. Four boys and three girls tried out for the supporting roles. Two females and one male appeared twice reading lines for the same scene, while the other three males and one female appeared only once for a total of five scenes. One hundred and nine ethnically mixed fourth fifth and sixth grade students watched the screen tests and filled out simple likability scales for each character in each scene. Following viewing, a subsample of seventeen students was asked to discuss why they liked or disliked each of the actors. Results showed wide variation of response over actors based on sex and

grade of respondents except for the supporting parts. Open-ended responses indicated that liking was tied strongly to student judgments based on acting ability and actor attractiveness. Since no clear picture emerged, production decisions were based primarily on creative considerations utilizing the open-ended feedback. For instance, the actress chosen for the female role was preferred by boys, but not by girls. Reasons given by girls were based on judgments of acting ability. This was not considered to be an obstacle by production because the actors had had very little time for rehearsing their parts and therefore the awkwardness could be overcome with sufficient rehearsal time. As for the supporting parts, results favored the two actors also favored by production, therefore, confirming that choice.

One other question arose during the filming of the pilot shows. In one scene of the first pilot, a definition was given for the word "stereotyping." However, just before the voiceover was to be recorded, someone raised a question about the appropriateness of the definition, that is, would teachers accept that definition as presently stated. Several teachers were asked about the definition and indicated that it was quite all right. One teacher double checked the definition with her fourth grade classroom by first asking students what the word meant. The only student that could even guess at the meaning thought the word had something to do with "stereo sets" and records. The teacher then used the FREESTYLE definition as an explanation, and confirmed understanding by asking students to give examples,

Students easily gave examples indicating that although the word was new to them, they had prior knowledge of the concept.

Although the broadcast component was able to utilize formative evaluation in a very impromptu manner on several occasions, the nonbroadcast component because of differing needs and constraints had only one unplanned question. In this case, it was a question of determining whether students had a bias for one or the other forms of the artwork used for the student booklet. Again, a fresh sample of students, ethnically mixed over grades four, five and six, were asked to respond. Half of the eighty-three student sample received one artwork form first and the other artwork second, while the process was reversed for the other half of the sample to eliminate the effect of order of presentation. Students favored the realistic artform over the cartoon style four to one, with no evident preference based on sex, grade or ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, ad hoc evaluations have provided information to the producers of broadcast and nonbroadcast materials to help minimize production costs in the early developmental stages. Quick answers have been provided to questions that could not wait until the national evaluations for answers as well as providing support for the intuitive, creative process. In addition to adding a miniature feedback loop within the major developmental feedback loop of formative evaluation, this service has also

provided another method for establishing good working relationships between the evaluation staff and the media producers prior to the major evaluation efforts.